

# THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN JAPAN: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

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## The Position of Women in Traditional Japan

In pre-war times, the family as a unit, more than the individual, held a significant place in the Japanese society. The law reflected this state of affairs by granting the head of the Japanese family, the father, absolute authority over the other family members. Any one member of the family who defied the househead's authority was subjected to the law of "kandoo" (expulsion from the family)<sup>1</sup>, the most feared of all punishments in old Japan.

In this patriarchal system, based on primogeniture, the eldest son, as the future head of the family, occupied a pre-eminent position. Among other things, he normally inherited the bulk of all family property. Naturally, it was his duty to care for the elderly parents and to look after the family line. Thus, if the male members of the traditional Japanese family were legally subject to the decisions of the household head in all important matters, it was even more true of the women in the family. A long-established custom in Japan, as in China and Korea, was that throughout her life a woman's duty was to follow three simple rules known as "three obediences": to her father when young, to her husband when married, and to her son when widowed.<sup>2</sup>

Within this family structure, sex differentiation and female inferiority were given emphasis from childbirth to adulthood. Thus, in the old practice, a female child was received with coldness by her parents "as to let her lie on the floor for three days". In contrast, a male child was given a soft cushioned bed and proper care. As they grow older, both boys and girls were made aware of the rule of separation between the sexes. Boys and girls were made to sit apart wherever they may be; girls were forbidden to touch men's belongings. This practice was so carried to its extreme that even in laundry, male and female clothing were not allowed to be hung on the same drying pole.<sup>3</sup> In other cases, a wife was made to observe the rule by walking behind her husband when going out with him.

Other more tragic conditions of women were seen in Japanese farming families. Here, the women were considered the least useful members of the family and during times of calamity or extreme poverty, the daughters were sacrificed for the sake of family survival. As Jack Seward pointed out in his observation:

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<sup>1</sup>R.P. Dore, *City Life In Japan: A Study of a Tokyo Ward* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1958), p. 101.

<sup>2</sup>Ernest W. Clement, *A Handbook of Modern Japan* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1907), p. 176 Cf. The West's Three K's: *Kinder* (children), *Kuche* (kitchen), and *Kirche* (church).

<sup>3</sup>Eisho Miyaki and Minobu Oi, *Nihan Joseisi* (The History of Japanese Women). (First rev. ed., Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobungkang, 1974), p. 144.

The practice of *mabiki* or “weeding out” children, especially young girls at birth, was common for hundreds of years and is evidenced in the Japanese proverb, “*Ko wo suteru yabu ga aredo oya wo suteru yabu wa nai,*” or, “Although there is a bamboo grove where you can leave your babies to die, there is none where you can discard your parents”.<sup>4</sup>

Such practice later aroused strong disapproval from many foreigners who then visited Japan that soon criticisms were heard. By the end of the 19th century however, the reformers listened to the reprobations of foreigners and only then was the practice of infanticide outlawed.

Other cases of preferential treatment for the family were seen in how the daughters were called upon to sacrifice their honor and enter brothels for the sake of saving their families. Once they were sold to brothel-owners, they were placed under long-term employment contracts and very rarely were they able to redeem their freedom. Jack Seward has further more to say about this:

Japanese society recognized that these girls were innocent pawns in a struggle for survival. Their quiet acceptance of this fate, in fact, bespoke their willingness to abandon their personal dreams of having their own homes and families in order that their families might live. They were regarded with pity—and respect.<sup>6</sup>

They were still considered virtuous, because “filial piety”, for the Japanese, was a higher virtue than “personal chastity”.<sup>7</sup>

In marriage, a girl had no freedom to choose her mate. She was resigned to accept her parents’ choice for her. In fact, early marriage was encouraged for the bride to adjust more easily to her new family’s customs (*kafuu*), and be more oriented to her mother-in-law’s instructions. “Submission to the mother-in-law’s commands and clear absorption of her instructions were essential duties of the young bride”.<sup>8</sup> Failure to learn the ways of the new family meant ostracism for the bride or a return to her original home. This practice became very common that it made a high divorce rate during the Meiji Period (1868-1912)<sup>9</sup>.

In the case of better families, brides were given a copy of the marriage manual by Kaibara Ekken (a Confucian scholar of the fifteenth century) as part of her trousseau. The little book entitled “*Onna Daigaku*” (The Great Learning for Women), was written for the guidance of the new bride so that she might understand clearly what was expected of her. The book was popular to most parents of the upper

<sup>4</sup>Jack Seward, *The Japanese* (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 90-91.

<sup>5</sup>Jean-Francois Delassus, *The Japanese: A Critical Evaluation of the Character & Culture of a People*, (New York: Hart Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), p. 116.

<sup>6</sup>Seward, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>7</sup>Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>8</sup>Dore, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>9</sup>Ezra F. Vogel, *Japan's New Middle Class; The Salary Man and His Family in a Tokyo Suburb* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1968), p. 166.

class since it summed up clearly what they were to teach their daughters. Some of the moral instructions found in the text are as follows:

"It is a girl's destiny, on reaching womanhood, to go to a new home, and to live in submission . . . Should her parents allow her to grow up self-willed, she will infallibly show herself capricious in her husband's house, and thus alienate his affection. The end of these domestic dissensions will be her dismissal from her husband's house and the covering of herself with ignominy.

The only qualities that befit a woman are gentle obedience, chastity, mercy and quietness.

A woman must consider her husband's home her own . . . However low and needy her husband's position may be, she must find no fault with him, but consider the poverty of the household [as that] which has pleased heaven to give her as the ordering of fate. Once married, she must never leave her husband's house.

Never should a woman fail, night and morning, to pay her respects to her father-in-law and mother-in-law.

A woman must look to her husband as her lord, and must serve him with all worship and reverence. The great lifelong duty of a woman is obedience. In her dealings with her husband, she should be courteous, humble, and conciliatory . . . When the husband issues his instructions, the wife must never disobey them . . . She should look on her husband as if he were Heaven [him]self.

The five worst infirmities that afflict the female are indocility, discontent, slander, jealousy, and silliness. It is from these that arises the inferiority of women to men. Women's nature is passive. As viewed from the standard of man's nature, the foolishness of a woman [lies in her failure] to understand the duties that are before her very eyes, [when she] perceives not the actions that will bring down blame upon her own enemy, estranging others and incurring their hatred . . . Such is the stupidity of her character, that it is incumbent upon her, in every particular, to distrust herself and to obey her husband.

A woman should yield to her husband in the first place, and be herself content with the second place. It is necessary for her to avoid pride, even if there be in her actions aught deserving praise . . . to endure without anger and indignation the jeers of others, suffering such things with patience and humility."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, Kaibara's moral treatise became the ideal for girls in the traditional Japanese society. It made clear that a woman's pleasure and freedom did not come from asserting her independence but rather from learning to want to do what was required of her. In practice, the married woman was taught she could never fully repay her debt of gratitude she owed her husband, and thus, she was obliged to show her gratitude every day of her life. Whether she loved him or not was beside the point. She was to serve him like a slave would to her master. She was the first

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<sup>10</sup>Quoted in David and Vera Mace, *Marriage: East and West* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), pp. 72-74.

to rise in the morning and the last to go to bed at night. In the evening, her husband bathed first, the children next, and she last. She always had the last of everything even in food. From a western observation:

"A Japanese, like a Grecian wife, was to her husband a faithful slave, 'something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse'; she was both a drudge and a plaything, to be cast aside as capriciously as a child throws away a toy."<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, the Japanese husbands, took concubines other than their wives. They were never discreet about their affairs and often, they would even ask their concubines to live in the same house with their wives. The wife was simply to keep quiet and not to make any complaint. Any sign of jealousy was taken to mean disrespect or a display of bad manners. It was for this reason that as early as the wedding day, it was a common practice to place a wide, white headband on the bride's head called "*tsuno-kakushi*" or horn-hider. This symbolic rite was supposed to signify the hiding of the proverbial female horns of jealousy by the wife, a reminder that she was not to expect her husband to be faithful to her nor was she to be jealous of anything he did.

In the past, the Japanese wife constantly lived in fear of being divorced by her husband or be sent back to her parents under slight and flimsy pretexts. Her husband could easily divorce her by simply giving her the infamous "*mikudari-han*" (literally, "three-and-a-half lines"), a letter of notification of intent to divorce, only three-and-a-half lines in length. Later, all that was required was a trip to the ward or town office by the head of the family to obliterate the girl's name from the family register. "It was therefore possible for the girl's in-laws, at the slightest whim, to terminate her marriage."<sup>13</sup> More often than not, divorces were commonly initiated not by the husbands but by the mothers-in-law. Whenever trouble erupted between the man's wife and her mother-in-law, the wife was usually sacrificed. To the son, repudiation by his parents was far more serious than divorce from his wife. For the Japanese, the answer to the traditional question, 'whom should a husband save if his wife and mother were drowning?' was, 'his mother' because he could always get another wife. <sup>14</sup>

As in China and Korea, the following "seven reasons" were considered legitimate to warrant a divorce: 1) disobedience to father-in-law or mother-in-law; 2) barrenness; 3) lewdness; 4) jealousy; 5) leprosy or any such foul disease; 6) garrulousness and prattling; 7) stealing.<sup>15</sup> Thus, while it was easy for the Japanese men to rid themselves of their wives by divorce, it was virtually impossible for Japanese women to obtain separation. Moreover, if her husband

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<sup>11</sup>Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>12</sup>Pearl S. Buck, *The People of Japan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), p. 77.

<sup>13</sup>Mace, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>14</sup>Vogel, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>15</sup>Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

divorced her, her chances for another marriage was very slim. She then came to be called "*demodori*" (a girl who had gone and come back), and for this, she was rated "one notch above cripples and untouchables in the order of desirability".<sup>16</sup>

On adultery in old Japan, a strongly unfair treatment awaited the woman who committed the crime, even if her husband was guilty of the same. For example, if her husband proved unfaithful to her, she could not take legal action against him. On the other hand, if she was caught committing adultery, both she and her lover were to face the penalty of death or the wife was to be lynched by her husband.<sup>17</sup> On this double standard, Stephen and Ethel Longstreet made the following observation:

He would often tell his wife of his pleasures outside the house and of the women with whom he copulated, away from her. A hedonist, greedy for his own gratifications, he was not to be berated for his vices. No wife would dare! Such was the old code, that she expected no fidelity, made no protest, for it was all too complex, contorted with tradition.<sup>18</sup>

In the case of death, prejudice against women was seen in the length of the mourning period required of the wife when her husband died. She was ordered by law to wear her mourning garments for thirteen months and to abstain from impurity for fifty days. On the other hand, in case of the wife's death, the husband was asked to mourn for only three months and abstinence for only twenty days was sufficient.<sup>19</sup>

Such was the discrimination against women in the social atmosphere of pre-war Japan. In marriage, divorce, and even in claims to property rights, women hardly existed as legal entities separate from their husbands. Attesting to this fact was the prevalence of Japanese proverbs hinting at women's inferiority:

*"Onna wa mamono"*. (Women are demons.)

*"Onna no saru-jie"*. (Woman's monkey-like wit.)

*"Onna sannin yoreba yakamashii"*. (Three women together make a terrible clatter.)

*"Onna wa sangai ni ie nashi"*. (A woman has no home in any of the three worlds.)<sup>20</sup>

*"Shichinin no ko wo nasu tomo onna ni kokoro wo yurusu na!*  
(Never trust a woman even though she has borne you seven children!)"<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Seward, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>17</sup>Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>18</sup>Stephen and Ethel Longstreet, *Yoshiwara: City of the Senses* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1970), p. 194.

<sup>19</sup>Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>20</sup>In this respect Kurt Steiner explained: "Japanese women were . . . 'houseless in three worlds': while young and unmarried they belonged to their father's house, being subject to his will; they entered their husband's house upon marriage, pledged obedience to him and the head of his house; when the husband died, the oldest son usually became head of the house, and the widow was subject to his will." See his "The Revision of the Civil Code of Japan: Provisions Affecting the Family," *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. IX, No. 2, February 1950, p. 181.

<sup>21</sup>Seward, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

### The Paradox in Tradition

In the beginning, Japan was a matriarchy. The legendary founder of the country was, in fact, not a god but a goddess—the Sun Goddess “Amateras-Omikami” (The Great Goddess Who Lights Up The Heaven). This symbolized the historic dependence of Japanese men upon women. In fact, during the ninth century and on to the Heian (Fujiwara) Period (794-1185), it was customary to see a matrilineal family wherein the husband moved in with his wife’s family upon marriage. Thus, in history, we recount that eight empresses had reigned on the Imperial Throne of Japan. Among the most remarkable that ruled was the Empress Jingo for her martial valor and military exploits. As Seward wrote:

About 200 A.D., the Empress Jingo, whose martial ways may have inspired our English word “jingoism”, led Japan to its first successful foreign conquest (of part of Korea), a feat that no Japanese man was able to match for seventeen hundred years.<sup>23</sup>

During the thirteenth century, a few women also became legendary fighters and were immortalized in the popular Kamakura war tales. For example,

The black-haired, fair-skinned Tomoe... was said to be a “match for a thousand warriors and fit to meet either God or devil”. More than once, it was recorded, she had “taken the field, armed at all points, and won matchless renown in encounters with the bravest captains”. In one fight, “when all the others had been slain or had fled, among the last seven, there rode Tomoe”.<sup>24</sup>

From the above statement, we gather how the military role of women once gained them prestige as remarkably displayed in this account.

It is also significant to note that at the dawn of Japanese civilization, women played a key role in the development of artistic and intellectual life. From the 5th to the 12th centuries, life at the Imperial Court gravitated around women and their activities. Japanese literature was born from the pen of Japanese noblewomen. The first great work of Japanese literature, “*Genji Monogatari*” (The Tale of Genji), was written in early eleventh century by the brilliant woman novelist Murasaki Shikibu. This did not mean however, that she was the only prominent woman writer in her era. As Ivan Morris pointed out: “During the period of almost one hundred years that span the world of the Tale of Genji, almost every noteworthy author who wrote in Japan was a woman.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Frank Gibney, “Those Exotic (Erotic) Japanese Women,” *Cosmopolitan*, May 1975, p. 181.

<sup>23</sup>Seward, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>24</sup>Peter Swerdloff, et.al., *Human Behavior: Men and Women* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1975), p. 17.

<sup>25</sup>Quoted in Robert J. Lifton, “Woman as Knower: Some Psycho-historical Perspectives,” in *The Woman In America*, Robert J. Lifton, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965), p. 29.

Lady Murasaki envisioned this fact when she wrote about the "sophisticated society" as a "world in which women not only moved as relative equals to men but even retained a certain superiority."<sup>26</sup> To this, one may well wonder what the women in those days particularly, the court ladies, thought of the condition of the irremediable inferiority of women in subsequent periods of Japanese history.

When then, was the beginning of the decline in the status of Japanese women? How did it occur?

According to Gibney, "as the unity of Imperial Kyoto was cracked, then shattered, and Japan plunged into a series of civil wars, so was the memory of the matriarchy."<sup>27</sup> It was at the beginning of the Muromachi Era (1333-1568) that Japan entered a period of worsening lawlessness and confusion. This was the time when the country descended into the second stage of feudalism and the government was unable to protect property. Landowners willed their estates to the single son strong enough to hold on to it, disinheriting daughters. As Gibney recounts:

By the fifteenth century, the country was totally ruled by the principle of "might makes right". Woman retreated to a subordinate position within the home, but she built up the home, ultimately, as her castle, and men recognized it as her domain. The familiar pattern of the young wife coming to live with her husband's family, being tyrannized by her mother-in-law, has been justifiably a favorite of Japanese novelists.<sup>28</sup>

The inferiority of women began to be felt more palpably under the iron rule of the Tokugawa, a line of dictators who reigned for three centuries, from 1600 to 1868. During this period, "the government was ran partly on Confucian principles with many of its laws ethical in nature."<sup>29</sup> Confucian ideas on individual relationships in the family or in society had greater influence and impact on the rulers. One idea that appealed especially to the rulers was the emphasis on "the virtues of loyalty to one's superiors and filial piety."<sup>30</sup> As Confucianism controlled every aspect of socio-economic, political and cultural life in Tokugawa times, the lives of Japanese women became shackled by a Confucian moral code that required every female to obey her father when she was young, her husband after her marriage, and her son in widowhood. A woman was accounted to be "a creature born to obedience and to be basically inferior to man".<sup>31</sup> Later, Confucian moralists went so far as to proclaim women's defects: "intractability, bad temper, jealousy, slanderousness, and stupidity."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Gibney, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>John F. Embree, *Suye Mura: A Japanese Village* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 2.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Mace, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>32</sup>Quoted in Delassus, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

It should be made clear however that during the Tokugawa regime, the idea of male dominance had been more deeply implanted by Buddhism rather than Confucianism. "Buddhism continued as before to be the dominant religion, overshadowing, and at times, assimilating the native Shinto."<sup>33</sup> It taught that woman was "the personification of all evil."<sup>34</sup> For the Buddhists, a woman was "a creature with the look of an angel on its countenance, but with a diabolical spirit in its inmost heart."<sup>35</sup> This was born out of the impression that "women were fundamentally more prone to sin than men, and that their only path to expiation lay in total subservience to the male element."<sup>36</sup> Thus, the Japanese women throughout the Tokugawa period were ordered to look up to their husbands as if they were lords and they were to be obeyed with fear and trembling. This began the enslavement of Japanese women within the feudalistic system of Tokugawa society.

It should be mentioned however that there were considerable differences in the subjection of women among the various classes in the Tokugawa society. There were the fixed and rigid class lines, the highest of which was the *samurai* (the warriors), followed by the peasantry, and lastly by the townsmen, artisans, and merchants. There were also two *pariah* classes: the *eta* and the *hinin*. The former was a hereditary caste performing several of the menial occupations that were taboo to the orthodox Buddhists such as slaughter of animals, execution of criminals, tanning and working of leather, and manufacture of footwear. The *hinin* was ascribed to individuals who had lost caste and thus, became beggars or criminals. Eventually, by the early Meiji Period (1868-1912). Both classes were abolished as legal entities in the antifeudal decrees. The samurai, the peasants, the townsmen, and the *eta* later became known as commoners.<sup>37</sup> It must be noted at this point that in the two lower classes (i.e., the peasants and the townsmen, the artisans and merchants), subordination of women was not as rigid as in the middle and upper classes. As Professor Chamberlain, who taught in Japan in the latter part of the 19th century, wrote:

The peasant women, the wives of artisans and small traders, have more liberty and a relatively higher position than the great ladies of the land. In these lower classes, the wife shares not only her husband's toil, but his counsels; and if she happens to have the better head of the two, she it is who will keep the purse and govern the family.<sup>38</sup>

Based on the above observation, it can be surmised that the family's economy somehow affected the women's activities in the old

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<sup>33</sup>Embree, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup>Quoted in Mace, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>Seward, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>37</sup>Herschel Webb, *An Introduction to Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), pp. 95-96. For further detailed discussion of the social classes of Tokugawa society, see Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, (New York: World Publishing, 1946), pp. 61-66.

<sup>38</sup>Basil H. Chamberlain, *Japanese Things* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1974), p. 508.

Japan during the Tokugawa regime. An exception to this were the wealthy merchants who, although looked upon as the lowest class, emulated the highest *samurai* even in the matter of female subjection.

Such considerable differences in the treatment of women among the various classes of the Tokugawa society bore no special cases exempt from rule nor was there a difference in the degree of respectability toward women. The degree of liberty among women in the lower classes was greater only in terms of participation in menial activities but they were no more respectable than the others. This was due to the fact that the idea of female inferiority was deeply embedded in the consciousness of the whole Tokugawa society.

### **Women in the Meiji Era (1868-1912) and After**

In 1867, the Tokugawa government fell and political power was returned to the Imperial Throne. Feudalism was abolished and the monarchy restored. In 1889, the emperor gave his people a constitution. The government abolished the *samurai* and the *eta* (untouchable) classes.

The era of the "Meiji" (Enlightened Government) sought modernization for all phases of the national life. The government accomplished industrialization and achieved military preparedness with great speed and efficiency. The most modern techniques in transportation and agriculture were established. In addition, education in modernized schools was made compulsory. "Ninety-eight per cent of the children were in school by the end of the Meiji period, a percentage considerably higher than that in the United States."<sup>39</sup> Schools for women were established in the seventies and eighties. Soon women gained legal rights to head households, inherit property, and initiate divorce actions.

Educational advantages for Japanese girls very largely increased. In 1885, for example, there were 600 students in nine girls' high schools, and in 1912, the total number of student population increased to 74,816 in 297 girls' high schools. These schools however simply offered vocational training. They were mainly structured "to educate young girls to become good housewives to their husbands, good mothers to their children".<sup>41</sup> They emphasized mostly the cultivation of such arts as flower arrangement, the playing of musical instruments, and the performance of the tea ceremony. Quite naturally, the education for girls was fittingly designed to exclude women from male activities.<sup>42</sup>

Just as Kaibara's "Onna Daigaku" (The Greater Learning for Women) was the standard text for female education under the Tokugawa regime, so, too, the Meiji Era (1868-1912) had its own "Shin

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<sup>39</sup>Buck, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>40</sup>Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup>Dore, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

(New) Onna-Daigaku" by Mr. Fukuzawa, the famous educator. While showing the untenability of the teaching of Kaibara's chauvinistic "Onna-Daigaku", Mr. Fukuzawa did not rush to the opposite extreme. He argued that women should not attempt to imitate men since they had their own spheres of activity and had to keep to them. As to education for girls, he stressed the necessity of giving them a thorough drilling in household duties. In relation to this, the "Sekai-no-Nihon" (The World's Japan) reviewed:

They should have a knowledge of cooking; they should be taught how to make the most of money, how to manage servants, etc. Next to these things, he [Mr. Fukuzawa] attaches great importance to their being instructed in the laws of health. Among other subjects, botany is to be recommended as specially suited to the female mind. He further argues that women should be taught Economy and Law. He thinks that a knowledge of these subjects will tend to develop their general intelligence, and save them from becoming the creatures of emotion.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, higher education for women tended to concentrate on the acquisition of such accomplishments mentioned above. It is however, true that there was constant pressure for the entry of women into the professions which had been opened to them in the West. As R.P. Dore said:

It achieved some considerable success; more intellectual and vocational higher educational institutions for women were founded; and medicine, school-teaching and nursing were fairly opened to them.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, in 1900, the English Normal School intended primarily to train young women to be efficient English teachers was established. The founder of the said school was Miss Umeko Tsuda, an exemplary product of the period in so far as being the type of "the new woman" at the time. (Miss Tsuda, at the age of eight, was the youngest of the first group of Japanese girls sent to the United States in 1871 to be educated there. Since her return to Japan, she tried to elevate the condition of Japanese women by founding a school primarily for them.)<sup>45</sup> Later, the Tokyo Woman's Medical School was opened and in 1912, this was developed into a full-fledged college for medicine and dentistry.<sup>46</sup> In 1901, another important institution for Japanese women was opened in Tokyo called the University for Women. This was founded "... to educate women to become good housewives as well as good mothers, and to cultivate the spirit of the *samurai* home."<sup>47</sup> On the whole, one can say that professional education for women was limited to home economics, music, art, education, medicine, and literature.

In view of these facts, it is clear that despite the popularization of education among women, not much progress was made accessible

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<sup>43</sup>Quoted in Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

<sup>44</sup>Dore, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>45</sup>Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>46</sup>Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-244.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 243.

to them. Education for them was still devised to orient them to a subordinate position. Furthermore, women were taught not to assert for independence nor claim equality with men. In other words, it was not the purpose of education during the Meiji Period to liberate women and recognize them as respectable individual persons.<sup>48</sup> This concept prevailed even until after the Second World War.

With the institution of the new Civil Code however, legal rights for women to head households, inherit property, and initiate divorce actions were effected. Nevertheless, tradition or the unwritten law (which had always been the real basis of the family system) continued to dominate the social system of Japan. In fact, inheritance of property and succession to headship by women were shunned although their occurrence were not entirely absent. As to divorce, no legal provision was made for the husband or the wife to support the divorced spouse.

The inferior position of the married woman in Japanese life and law was clearly seen in a family situation known as "*shoshi*", i.e., 'recognized illegitimate children'. Here, a man who had a child by a woman other than his wife and personally acknowledged by him automatically creates responsibility for the legal wife to accept the child ("*shoshi*") as her own. She had no choice but to accept the responsibility as stipulated in Article 728.<sup>49</sup> As Kurt Steiner remarks:

Thus adultery on the side of the husband, committed with an unmarried woman, was not only free of any sanctions of civil or criminal law—a status which encouraged the not uncommon practice of keeping a mistress—but the offspring could legally be forced upon the wife as if it were her own.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, despite the legal provisions for women's rights embodied in the new Civil Code, the inferior status of women remained unchanged.

With the onset of industrialization, employment opportunities for women also improved. For instance, weaving which used to be done by women in the home was later transferred to factories with modern machinery, thus, creating an increase in the demand for female workers. This was also true in cotton mills, match factories, tobacco shops, and many other such places of work. Employment was also opened to them in printing offices, in telephone exchange posts, in post offices, and railway ticket stations. Likewise, in hospitals and schools, Japanese young women were finding their sphere.

Such development however, affected only a small percentage of the nation thus making the majority of women dependent on male support. According to a 1914 survey, the women earned only 65% of the men's wage in the textile industry.<sup>51</sup> These girls had to pay for their room and board and for their working clothes, while the rest of their

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<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>49</sup>Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>50</sup>Steiner, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>51</sup>Yasuko Ito, *Sergo Nihon Josei si* (The History of Post-War Japanese Women), (Tokyo: Otsukishoten, 1974), p. 14.

savings were used for their transportation fares when vacationing to their respective hometowns. In most of their employment offices, working conditions were very poor. In the textile industry, for example, the workers were mostly young single girls who came from far away homes and were housed by employers in unhealthy small dormitories. They were forced to work 12 hours a day with only 30 to 40 minutes break period. Their private lives were closely watched by their supervisors, this including the inspection of letters sent to them. The purpose of such harrassment was to prevent them from escaping.<sup>52</sup>

In both artistic and literary fields, many Japanese women displayed their skill. Yet, the Japanese chauvinist culture hardly respected them. According to Frank Gibney:

When the newspaper *Hochi Shibun* daringly hired a few women writers in the early 1900's, the editors kept quiet about it. "If it were known that women were the authors of the paragraphs read by the general readers"—it was explained—"silly prejudices would destroy the effect of the writing."<sup>53</sup>

Under these circumstances, a women's liberation movement began to emerge in Japan. It was, however, literally a struggle with its own heroines and standard-bearers. For instance, in September 1911, a literary association called "*Seitoshu*" (or Blue Stocking) was born. Under the courageous leadership of Hirajuka Raicho, the association was launched to liberate women through the propagation of women's literature. In the first publication of *Seito*, the organ of the association, Hirajuka Raicho stated the following in its foreword:

Originally, a woman was indeed like the sun and a free person in her own right. Now, a woman is like the moon. She lives depending on others and shines with the help of [an]other light. She is the moon, pale like a sick person.<sup>54</sup>

Such a moving remark drew sympathy from many women who were discontented with their own contemporary situation. This led to an increased demand for the magazine from the reading public. Although the magazine published only a thousand copies at the start, the circulation increased to three thousand copies in a year's time. In its subsequent publication, more articles featured women and problems concerning them. Hirajuka herself stated:

The women in Japan wished to destroy the old moral code as well as the laws that were made by men for their own convenience.<sup>55</sup>

The later issues of *Seito*, especially the 1913 February and March issues of the said magazine, created an overwhelming controversy in Japan that its sale was prohibited by the authorities. The Japanese government felt that such agitations by the women's liberation

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<sup>52</sup>Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

<sup>53</sup>Gibney, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>54</sup>Quoted in Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

<sup>55</sup>Ito, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

movement threatened the foundation of the traditional family system in Japan.<sup>56</sup> Under such a policy of suppression, one teacher was expelled from her school for having subscribed to the *Seito*.<sup>57</sup>

When the founder of the magazine, Hirajuka, married, another women's liberation activist named Ito succeeded her. However, because of government pressure, she was not able to continue the publication of the magazine. Thus, the magazine ceased publication in February 1916.

Later, in 1923, the government began its drive to sweep off activism in the country as part of the national security measure. All social activists were arrested. Ito, Hirajuka's successor for the defunct *Seito*, then married a man from the anarchist political movement, and for being active in the women's movement, she found herself blacklisted. Much later, the couple was reported to have been massacred by the military police.<sup>58</sup>

Such a move however did not silence the reformers. In fact, it raised mass protests before lawyers and publicists. Many of the reformists attacked the Civil Code of 1898 for still upholding the ideals of the old family system. They, then, urged "the liberalization of the family laws", and demanded "greater [liberty for] the individual, [freedom] from family control, and an enhancement of the position of women vis-a-vis that of men."<sup>59</sup> However, the reformers' efforts came to naught because of the strong reaction of the traditionalists.

In 1918, a rice riot was started by housewives who lived in fishing villages and in what used to be *eta* communities.<sup>60</sup> With the support of many housewives in various cities and localities, the riot spread through to the other vicinities and gained many sympathizers. In 1919, an Emergency Legal Commission of Enquiry was established to study the cause of social unrest and to make recommendations therefrom. In 1925 and 1927, the commission's recommendations were published. Accordingly, the commission recommended the following:

The powers of the househead were to be lessened, parental control over marriage reduced, and the independence of women to be somewhat enhanced.<sup>61</sup>

These recommendations however were never implemented as the Army gradually gained power in the thirties. The voices of the reformers were silenced. The emphasis on traditional moral customs under the militarists once again relegated the women into the background.

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<sup>56</sup>Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

<sup>57</sup>Ito, *loc. cit.*

<sup>58</sup>Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>59</sup>Dore, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>60</sup>As discussed earlier, the Meiji Reformation of 1868 emancipated the outcasts theoretically, but barriers which separated them from the people who were above them were slow in coming down. Even today true social equality for the former *eta* is much more difficult to achieve. For example, intermarriage with *eta* is still frowned upon by Japanese of other classes.

<sup>61</sup>Dore, *loc. cit.*

### The New Woman in the Post-War Japan

Change in the status of Japanese women has become more specially evident only during the post-war period. Their legal rights have broadened since then. The new Constitution of Japan (which was passed in 1946) provided for equality under the law and respectability of individuals. Other laws were passed abolishing discrimination between the sexes in conformity with the provisions of the said Constitution. Older women (20 years and above) were given the right to vote and to be elected to public office. Thus, in the same year (1946), approximately 67% of the women electorate casted their ballots, and 39 out of the 89 women candidates were elected to the National Diet. According to an official report on the women's participation in the elections at that time,

Since then, through the elections of members of the House of Representatives, of the House of Councilors, and of the local assemblies, the voting rate of women has always been over 60%.<sup>62</sup>

Lately, however, there has been a decrease in the number of women candidates participating in both house and local elections. For example, in 1973, the number of women in the House of Representatives declined from 39 in 1946 to only 7, even as the House itself grew from 466 members to 491.<sup>63</sup> As of 1977, women representation remained low with only six women in the House of Representatives, and a little more in number in the House of Councilors. No explanation however has been given for the steep decline in women's participation.

Education, on the other hand, took the form of *coeducation* where both boys and girls combined in a class for formal learning. The popularity of coeducation became so influential that 85 per cent out of every one hundred public educational institutions in Japan are now *coed*.<sup>64</sup> This has given the girls more chances to get a higher education. Thus, girls almost equal boys in number as they move from junior highschool to senior highschool. Today, the percentage of women and men going to college is almost equal. Most girls however go to two-year junior colleges to study home economics, literature, and teacher training while the men fill up the four-year universities. Statistics show that in 1971, only 18.5 per cent of the four-year university students were female while in the junior colleges 83.2 per cent of the students were women.<sup>65</sup> This goes to show that in the Japanese society, there is still the common notion that junior colleges are the "finishing schools" for girls who, eventually are to become mothers and housewives.

Yet, with the introduction of better education for women, better quality employment has also been opened to them. Many more

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<sup>62</sup>Japan: Its Land, People, and Culture, compiled by Japanese National Commission for UNESCO (Tokyo: Printing Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1958), p. 229.

<sup>63</sup>William H. Horbis, *Japan Today: People, Places, Power*. (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1975), p. 35.

<sup>64</sup>Delassus, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>65</sup>Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

women have pursued their careers to professionalism because of this advancement in the national outlook of Japan.

Thanks partly to increased educational opportunities and partly to the labor shortage in Japan. Women have become doctors, bureaucrats, professors, and businesswomen in numbers; their mothers, not to mention their grandmothers, would have thought fantastic.<sup>66</sup>

The entry of women into various kinds of occupations started during World War II when they were called to replace the working men summoned to the colors. After the war, however, more and more women began to take additional jobs. In 1948, the total number of working women reached about 3,000,000 and in 1970, it grew to about 10,960,000, then composing 33.2% of the total employment.<sup>67</sup> In 1976, the female population of the labor force reached 19,960,000, which was 38% of the country's labor force.<sup>68</sup>

During the ten years from 1960 to 1970, a most remarkable increase in the number of working women took place in the manufacturing industries, in the personal service industries, and in the wholesale and retail trades. This was also true in banking institutions, insurance, and real estate. Statistics in 1974 showed that more than 80% of working women concentrated in manufacturing, personal services, and in the wholesale and retail trades.<sup>69</sup> It should be noted at this point that before 1950, as in pre-war times, majority of the Japanese working women were engaged in agriculture and in forestry. With the growth of Japan's economy beginning 1955, the number of working women in agriculture and forestry greatly declined. In 1974, only 17% of working women remained in these industries.<sup>70</sup>

Today, Japanese women hold professional and technical jobs. Many of them have become teachers, doctors and pharmacists. Many others are in such fields as mass communications, advertising, foreign trade, and even science technology. New opportunities have recently been opened to them where only men used to occupy positions of authority. For instance, Midori Sato operates a detective agency that employs thirty people including her own husband. She is so well thought of that the Imperial Palace asked her to investigate the background of a young woman whom Crown Prince Akihito wanted to marry. Mrs. Sato received the order with approval.<sup>71</sup>

In 1974, Aiko Noda became the first woman to sit on Japan's High Court [equivalent to the United States' Court of Appeals]. Reflecting on her status, she stated:

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<sup>66</sup>Gibney, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>67</sup>Miyaki and Oi, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

<sup>68</sup>*Fujinrodo no Chizujo* (The Actual Condition of Working Women), edited by Bureau of Women and Minors, Ministry of Labor (Tokyo: Printing Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1975), p. 5.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>71</sup>*The New York Times*, June 17, 1974, p. 36.

Perhaps twenty years ago I was a pioneer. But these days, things are different and there are fewer obstacles for women.<sup>72</sup>

While there are a few other jobs that remain closed to women, the barriers to them are gradually disappearing as in Aiko Noda's case. However, it might be well to note that women constitute only 8% of doctors, half of 1% of lawyers, and 1% of civil servants in managerial jobs. They comprise half the elementary school teachers, but only 1% of all elementary school principals. Moreover, despite the law of equal pay for equal work, the pay for Japanese women averages only one-half that of men, and men get all the choice positions.<sup>73</sup>

In discussing today's Japanese women in employment, we cannot help but think of the traditional Japanese society, in which a girl from a good family would rarely have been permitted to work before marriage. Nowadays, work outside the home is the norm even for well-to-do girls. As Paul F. Langer points out:

They are eager to escape the restrictions of the home, have fun and gain sophistication—and perhaps, a husband—through employment in one of Japan's modern, large-scale enterprises. Such girls are swelling the ranks of what the Japanese call 'BG' (an abbreviation of the Japanese-coined words 'business girl', meaning a girl working in a business enterprise). Smartly dressed and made up, they set the style in the larger cities today.<sup>74</sup>

Thus, as we can see, today's Japanese society has shed off its prejudice against the working women.

The position of Japanese women in marriage has also been liberalized since the war. Since 1947 the principle of equality between the sexes has been established in relation to freedom of marriage and divorce, property and inheritance rights, parental rights, and so forth. By law, parents may not force their children into marriage against their wishes. Parental consent is no longer required for marriage over the age of twenty, and below that age, the consent of one parent will suffice.

Divorce, on the other hand, is no longer a unilateral act of the husband. According to the new Code, infidelity by the husband, not only by the wife, can be a ground for judicial divorce. Women can now therefore obtain a divorce as easily as men. Alimony as well as other forms of settlement are now as commonplace as they are in the United States.

As for inheritance to property, equal division between children of both sexes has become the basis for partition, with a reserved portion for the surviving spouse. The new provision also removes from the husband his previous power to restrict his wife's exercise of property rights. It has also abolished the "*shoshi*", (illegitimate children of the husband which the old Code required the legal wife to recognize as her

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<sup>72</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup>Horbis, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>74</sup>Paul F. Langer, *Japan: Yesterday and Today*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 175.

own). Husbands and wives now cooperate together and determine their place of residence by mutual consent. Where once, only the father was the sole authority under the law, parents now share authority in the upbringing and education of their children. The new Code eliminates the position of the househead and his power over other family members.<sup>75</sup>

Aside from the legal changes discussed thus far, there is no discrimination between the sexes regarding freedom of assembly, association, and speech. Japanese women have begun to organize themselves into political, religious, and economic groupings such as, the Housewife's Federation, the League of Women Voters, YWCA, WCTU (the Women's Christian Temperance Union), the Council Regional Women's Clubs, the Council Widow's Organization, etc. Today, "two thirds of the female population belong to some kind of an active women's association,"<sup>76</sup> and their collective voices are heeded to an extent undreamed of in pre-war days.

All these changes have proclaimed the equality of the sexes in matters pertaining to marriage and the family as provided for in the new laws. Yet, it is hardly believed that the emancipation of Japanese women can be realized by a mere change in the laws. To this, Kurt Steiner comments:

... a system that is as strongly entrenched in the past and has as far-reaching ramifications as the Japanese family system cannot be altered by the strike of the pen of any lawmaker.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the enactment of the new laws has had considerable effect in elevating the status of Japanese women.

In addition to the legal protection and safeguards afforded to women, technological changes have also freed the Japanese housewife from much drudgery which used to keep her busy in the house all day. The introduction of modern house appliances has given her more free time. Electrical appliances such as refrigerators and washing machines have minimized the time spent on shopping and laundering. Television has been of tremendous support in the emancipation of Japanese women.

On the whole, the increase in social mobility associated with urbanization has weakened the traditional extended family concept—"the elaborate, many-generationed structure of siblings and in-laws and adopted sons, of 'main families' and 'branch families' ruled by *paterfamilias* on the principles of unbroken family line and inheritance by the eldest son".<sup>78</sup> Consequently, many young couples are now setting up

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<sup>75</sup>Dore, *op. cit.*, p. 119. For a summary of these legal changes, see Steiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-184.

<sup>76</sup>Delassus, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>77</sup>Steiner, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

<sup>78</sup>Horbis, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

their own nuclear family—a family comprising of the married couple and their children. Thus, in 1965, it has been observed that the average number of persons in a household was 4.05 but this decreased to 3.7 in 1972.<sup>79</sup> This change brought about by the nuclear family set-up has not only liberated the Japanese housewife from the harshness of her mother-in-law but also facilitated her in the management of her household duties.

The government, on the other hand, has introduced family planning in the country and encouraged couples to practice birth control. Thus, in more recent years, the birth rate in Japan has only been about 17 per 1,000, one of the lowest in the world.<sup>80</sup> As one foreign observer notes:

Nowadays, a great many Japanese women have themselves sterilized after their first or second child. The pill is gaining ground, and consequently, abortions are becoming less frequent. This wholesale acceptance of birth control, unique in world history, has been so successful that the government, faced with a possible depletion of the national work force, is considering a change of policy.<sup>81</sup>

Because of the many changes in the Japanese life structure, Japan's social values have also altered. Relations between the sexes have unquestionably become far freer than they had been. Men sometimes do the dishes, and it is commonplace to see young couples stroll hand-in-hand through city streets, a thing unheard of in the past. Young boys and girls gather in coffee shops for long hours. They roar noisily around town on motorcycles. Many young Japanese women, too, are no longer wearing the kimono but jeans. In fact, the latter has become an integral part of the Japanese lifestyle.<sup>82</sup> Among other things, the women have increasingly become open about their sexual lives and often, they bring up their sexual problems without inhibition. Many women's magazines have taken the liberty to publish articles and surveys on sex and the young girl. One such magazine which became popular throughout Japan is the *Fujin-Korong*. It published such articles as "What is Sexual Freedom?", "Women Can Love Many Men At the Same Time", "The Reason for Recommending Wife-Swapping", "Happy Divorce I Have Experienced", etc.<sup>83</sup> Today, modern Japanese girls jokingly summarize the qualifications of an eligible boyfriend in a cynical phrase: "*Iye tsuki, car tsuki, baba nuki*", (with a house, with a car, without an old lady).<sup>84</sup> The modern Japanese wife, too, has gained control of the household finances. In fact, she has become the target of the consumer-marketing man. As Frank Gibney puts it:

She controls most of the money. Today, in almost ninety per cent of Japanese households, the husband brings home his monthly pay

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<sup>79</sup>*Time*, June 5, 1972, p. 40.

<sup>80</sup>Delassus, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup>*The New York Times*, June 8, 1976, p. 29.

<sup>83</sup>Cf. *Fujin-korong* (The Woman's Public Opinion), May 1976.

<sup>84</sup>*Time*, June 5, 1972, p. 40.

envelope and turns it over to the wife. She doles out his pocket money, decides about purchases, and does most of the buying.<sup>85</sup>

All these changes have somehow shocked those of the older generation who vividly remember Japanese women to be withdrawn, silent, subdued. Representative of this contemptuous feeling toward the new Japanese woman is the impression best described by Shoichi Yokoi, the Japanese Imperial Army corporal who lived in a cave in Guam for 28 years, and only emerged from that hiding place in January, 1972. *Time* magazine reported on this as follows:

Youth is not the only group that Yokoi finds dismally altered. Women, he rages, have become "monsters". Virtue has "all but gone from them", and so has gentleness—"they screech like apes". In Tokyo, right after his return from Guam, he saw a woman who proved typical of many [modern] Japanese females. "She was in what is known as a mini. Her hair was dyed red, her fingernails were painted, and her eyes were so shadowed in purple that she looked like a ghost. She was everything I didn't dream about in the jungle."

The magazine went further as to say:

What he did dream of was the kind of girl he knew before he was shipped off to war: "Then women were everything that made life blissful for men—virtuous, obedient to commands from menfolk, lovely to look at, gentle and retiring."<sup>86</sup>

#### *The Tenacity of Old Custom*

After the war, nothing in Japan has changed so much as the woman. Yet, the position of women in Japan especially in villages and rural towns, continue to follow tradition and its norms. The husband is still supreme in his house. The wife never calls her husband by his first name but addresses him with the honorable title due him as "Sir". The father, as head of the household is served first at meals. In the family bath, the husband and then the sons have absolute priority at the pinewood bathtub or at the ceramic basin. In turn, the father receives with a nod the deep bows of his family.

According to an American's observation, there are still many practices in Japan which make the women rank second to men. For example, when her husband receives guests in their home, the wife, most of the time, eats in the kitchen. In this respect, an American described his own experience as follows:

Within five days after first reaching Japan, I was guest for dinner in a Japanese house at which the wife did not feel entitled to eat with the men, talked animatedly with her husband but said "yes" to his every remark, and trotted rather than walked back and forth to the kitchen.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Gibney, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>86</sup>*Time*, September 18, 1972, p. 67.

<sup>87</sup>Horbis, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

The same American cautioned American women newly arriving in Japan that "if they board elevators first, as is the custom at home, they bump into men who are boarding first as is the custom in Japan."<sup>88</sup> Thus, it is common practice in Japan for a woman to step back to allow her husband to go first, and even in buses, she would be the one to let him take the last empty seat on the subway.

### *Discrimination In Employment*

While it is true that the Japanese working women today enjoy legal protection and other safeguards, one can still witness residual forms of discrimination in many employment firms. This can be observed not only in the area of salary or finance but also in more subtle patterns which include relegating women to serving tea and waiting on men in various ways. As Horbis explained:

The most scandalous evasion is the "thirty and out" custom, whereby employers fire white-collar women at that age or earlier on such grounds as that girls are just "office flowers" whose job (as one feminist puts it) is "to meet guests, to be charming and young, and to pour the tea."<sup>89</sup>

It is not surprising then that women rarely move on to senior jobs and are often denied promotions equal to that of men. In another occasion, a small group of lawyers and feminists were recently pressing for the dismissal of a law school dean for his statement that women lawyers should get out of the legal profession and stay home. Judging from reports filed with the investigating committee by four professor-judges, male chauvinism indeed continue to prevail even in career practice:

- A: "I dont like girls to study because girls who like to study are not charming. That is my personal opinion."
- B: "I think it is better for women to become housewives and mothers than to become businesswomen, because to marry and have children is a very valuable task. I recommend that women not be lawyers. It is the traditional Japanese system."
- C: "If a woman requires maternity leave, her male colleagues have to work harder, so men judges don't welcome women lawyers as judges. If women have the will to achieve difficult tasks, they should study harder and have more ability than men."<sup>90</sup>

### *The Divorce Constraint*

On the matter of divorce, the technicalities are very simple. If the couple agrees on the divorce, they just march down to their local ward office and submit a form that has been signed by two adult witnesses. The cost is minimal. However, the social stigma it carries brings a kind of humiliation or "loss of face" to the divorcees. This is true in Japan more than in anywhere else. For this reason, the divorce rate in Japan is

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<sup>88</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>89</sup>*ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>90</sup>Quoted in *Paterson News*, October 27, 1976, p. 13.

lower (one out of ten) than that of the United States (one out of three).<sup>91</sup> Of course, divorced women can still make their way in Japanese society. But it is very difficult in Japan where male prerogatives are still all pervasive. It "is thus liable to discourage all but the most unhappily married or the strongest in character."<sup>92</sup>

### *The marriage factor*

Love marriages in modern day Japan are gaining in popularity. The Imperial family itself set an example in this respect. Crown Prince Akihito reportedly first met Michiko, the lady who later became his wife, at a tennis court in a fashionable mountain resort near Tokyo. Despite existing social barriers at the time for romance between two persons of different social class levels, love bloomed between them which later led to marriage plans. Akihito succeeded in marrying the woman he loved despite opposition from court conservatives.<sup>93</sup>

In most cases, however, marriages in Japan (roughly two out of three)<sup>94</sup> are still arranged by the families. Many Japanese men marry the woman their parents have chosen for them and for this reason, they are prone to keep family and romantic love separate, as was the case in the traditional Japanese society. Thus, it has become commonly accepted for Japanese men to fulfill their romantic love through their relationships with other women. The Japanese women, on the other hand, are simply forced to put up with the still existing double standard.

### *The suppression of prostitution*

Another indicator of the women's status in Japan can be seen in the vicissitudes of prostitution (one of the Japanese words for which is *baishun*, or "selling spring"). Historically, the brothels in which the Japanese girls worked were mostly concentrated in the regulated areas throughout the country. These were often surrounded by walls or moats, like Tobita in Osaka and Yoshiwara in Tokyo. Yoshiwara became the most famous in Japan and lasted from the early 1600's until its end by government decree on the first day of April, 1958.

In its heyday, it was a city within a city, with fine shops and all the sources of supply and service it needed to function as a municipal entity. Called the Fuyajo (the castle that knows no night), it closed its gates at midnight, which was the hour of curfew, but the revelers trapped within merely continued their bacchanalia until the gates were opened again at six o'clock the following morning.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Horbis, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>92</sup>*The New York Times*, May 6, 1975, p. 44.

<sup>93</sup>*The New York Times Magazine*, September 26, 1971, p. 64.

<sup>94</sup>Delassus, *op. cit.*, p. 127. Today there has been also an amalgamation of old tradition (arranged marriage) and modern custom (love marriage). Son or daughter falls in love and then he or she asks parents' consent or approval. If they consent, then marriage takes place.

<sup>95</sup>Seward, *op. cit.*, p. 91. For a detailed discussion on Yoshiwara in Tokyo, see Longstreet, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-225.

The prostitutes confined to the environs of Yoshiwara were almost similar to the birds in the cage. They could leave Yoshiwara for only two reasons: "to visit dying parents or, in a group, to see the cherry blossoms in Ueno, which betokens the importance of cherry-blossom viewing in the Japanese scheme of things".<sup>96</sup>

As the status of women was rising after the Second World War, Japanese wives began to cry out against money spent on geisha parties, bar girls, and whores.<sup>97</sup> A vocal minority of Japanese housewives demanded that the government take steps to abolish legalized prostitution, including, of course, Yoshiwara. In 1949, laws were already introduced to abolish Yoshiwara and all places like it but it was only in 1958 that prostitution was forbidden and finally abolished.

Oddly enough, according to the Anti-Prostitution Law, it was a crime for a woman to sell her body, and yet it was not a crime for a man to pay for the pleasures it offers him. In 1966, therefore, Japanese women tried to correct this oversight. They worked for the passage of a bill that would make it illegal for a man to buy the services of a prostitute or even to ask anyone to help find such a woman. Nevertheless, the bill was vetoed, mainly for the reason that Japan's male lawmakers were in no mood to consider any extension of the Anti-Prostitution Law.<sup>98</sup>

The abolition of Japan's red-light districts did not eliminate the prostitutes. Most of the former prostitutes worked "underground", rendering their services in the guise of masseuses, girl guides, Turkish bath attendants, waitresses, cabaret hostesses, and models at nude-posing studios. Today those who work with pimps find themselves slaves to masters more heartless and demanding than any Yoshiwara brothel-keeper.

The degradation of Japanese women in the past was also seen in the aspect of tourism. Accordingly, she was an entertainment guide to Japanese night life. This created an impression about modern Japanese girls available to the tourist who thinks of himself as a sensualist:

Japanese woman is a national treasure. At her best, she is a living art form... and much too good to be true. But she is true... Japan puts armies of young women to work in factories and offices, but it also employs thousands more like lilies of the field, neither to toil nor spin, but mainly to gladden the heart and beautify the scene.<sup>99</sup>

This sounds outrageous to those who regard and treat women as human beings.

Japanese men on the other hand, with their history of exploitation of women in previous years have not gotten over their hedonism that they seek satisfaction elsewhere, even outside their own country,

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<sup>96</sup>Seward, *loc. cit.*

<sup>97</sup>It should be noted that unlike a prostitute, a geisha and a bar girl do not usually earn their living by sexual favors.

<sup>98</sup>Seward, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>99</sup>Quoted in Longstreet, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

especially the neighboring countries. Of course, sightseeing could be one prevalent motive for the Japanese when touring Europe or the United States, especially where groups include both husbands and wives. Nevertheless, many groups who go to nearby countries in Asia are mostly made up of men. In this case the motive of their desire to travel is aptly phrased in "a little wander plus a lot of lust".<sup>100</sup>

A description of Japanese tourists written by a Japanese newspaperman in Bangkok, Thailand states:

. . . group tour-guides [lead them] there, with flags held high, commonly march their platoons into bordellos and crisply call out the numbers of rooms to which each man has been assigned.<sup>101</sup>

In South Korea, Japanese men seek out *kisaeng* (Korean counterpart of the Japanese *geisha*) parties. Some indignant girls from a Christian Women's University went so far as to stage a demonstration at the Kimpo Airport in Seoul against Japanese *kisaeng* tourism. Their placards made this appeal:

Morals are corrupted and personalities degraded just to earn foreign currency. . . Stop the prostitution tours that are turning our fatherland into a red-light district for Japanese men.<sup>102</sup>

Their protest was soon taken up by women in Japan who staged a similar demonstration at Tokyo's Haneda Airport. The Japanese women carried placards "pleading with the 'sex animals' to 'feel ashamed,' and to cease and desist from 'prostitution sightseeing.'" <sup>103</sup> Despite this joint Korean-Japanese women's struggle, the same malpractices are still going on.

Considering these facts, Japanese men still seem to think it their privilege to have sex outside the home. Pearl Buck who is well versed in Japanese culture, ruefully observed: "The Japanese man has not yet learned to enjoy woman as a human being."<sup>104</sup>

Thus, it is obvious that the supremacy of the male still holds in all areas of Japanese life.

## Conclusion

The tradition of male dominance did not always prevail in old Japan. There had also been clear-cut matriarchal overtones at times in the distant past. The Japanese women also once played important roles in various fields of their society based on a matriarchal system. Their privileged status however declined throughout the Feudalistic Age which lasted until Japan decided to open her doors to the outer world

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<sup>100</sup>Horbis, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>102</sup>Sekai, ed., *Letters from South Korea*, trans. by David L. Swain (New York: IDOC/North America, 1976), p. 86.

<sup>103</sup>Horbis, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>104</sup>Buck, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

in the middle of the 19th century. Then she began to emerge as one of the modern nations since the middle of the last century yet her women were still placed in the lowest position of society.

It was only after World War II that Japanese women were liberated legally and spiritually from the old bondage of the family system. For the first time in history, Japan allowed her women to know and to enjoy their human rights. With the legal promulgation of the new Constitution and new civil laws, women are now guaranteed the right to participate in various activities in their society on an equal basis with men. Although their numbers are still small, women now play important roles in many fields.

Yet realistically speaking, old attitudes die hard. The customs of the centuries and inherent traditions cannot be changed easily by Western example or by constitutional decrees or amendment to labor laws. Tradition has placed it on women to be just as mothers and wives and this has so far been a formidable block to the big and radical liberation movement. It is also true that today's Japanese women are slowly becoming more aware of their disfavored status. This self-awareness however, should be considered a hopeful sign that the Japanese women may, in the future, eventually liberate themselves. The passions that sparked the American feminist movement in the recent past may yet have to be seen in Japan.